



— From the Pen of —
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The Behavior of People

The second characteristic of planning is that it deals with future *behavior of people*. Do not assume that the people you deal with are any different than the people that anyone else deals with in the world, in industry, in business, or in another country.

A man asked me after I had been in Africa about a day and a half, “What are your impressions of Africa?” “Well,” I said, “I have none yet except that it is like every other place I have ever been in. It is full of people!”

As trite as it sounds, people are an amazingly common denominator. In these past few years, as I have traveled and observed missions in many situations and have met missionaries who come from all over the world, I have been amazed. As we talked we could narrow the problems down to a small list. They are basically the same in every country, and the greatest problem is: “We deal with people.” Do not say, “Well, it is different in industry.” No, it is precisely the same. I have gone to industrial management seminars and listened to people in industrial settings grapple with the same problems that we grapple with in our work. Industrialists ask precisely the same questions we ask. When we plan, we are deciding now that other people will carry out specified actions at future periods. This means we have to coordinate, motivate, channel, guide, and communicate without fail.

One of the most important things we can learn about the future behavior of people is found in a catchy phrase: *take people action*. The principle is, if you expect someone to cooperate with you later in doing something, involve them now in the decision to do it. Two of the most important aspects of planning, dealing with the future behavior of people, are these: conditioning and timing.

We must condition people! Remember, management on the part of the Christian worker is never a partner to subterfuge or insincerity or anything that is the slightest bit dishonest or misrepresentative. Never! Conditioning does not mean deceiving people or hood-winking them or pulling the wool over their eyes. Conditioning means giving people information so that they know the facts. It means involving them in everything you know about the situation.

People hate secretiveness on the part of a leader. Why is a person secretive? Because his or her ego craves to know something that somebody else does not know.

R. E. Thompson, chairman of the board for the Far Eastern Gospel Crusade for many years, founder of Missionary Internship, and a missionary to China, says, "Tell your people everything you can tell them and they will seldom demand that you tell them what you should not tell them. There is a place for secrets, but if you will tell your people all you can, you will seldom find them asking you to tell them what you should not tell them."

How you go about telling depends on the subject matter and the situation at hand. Some things can be adequately conveyed in a memorandum or a letter, but letters are poor vehicles for communication. The best way, of course, is face to face; but the larger the group, the bigger the problem. Leaders should take advantage of every opportunity with people to condition them, and if they faithfully do so, people will not resent leaders when they forget. One of the manager's jobs is to condition people for the inevitable change that is coming down the road. God revealed his ways to Moses and his acts to the children of Israel. The person at the top must constantly be conditioning the people below. Take every opportunity to do so.

The other aspect of dealing with the behavior of people is *timing*. There is a time question: When? The immature leader always feels it must be done now; and if it cannot be done now, a personal affront is taken. That is immaturity. I remember one time as a pastor I had a bright idea. The only problem was that it occurred to me on Monday and we were having our annual business meeting on Wednesday. So, I sprung it on the congregation! Do you know what happened? They threw it out. Because it was a bad idea? No, it was a good one. A year later they accepted the idea with no problem. What was wrong? My timing was off. When we are planning for the future behavior of people, we must have both condition and time. Know well in advance definitely where you are going.